

# Being Outdoors Improves Children's Ability to Learn

A study recently published in the academic journal, *Frontiers in Psychology*, found that teaching a lesson to children outside allowed teachers to retain the attention of the kids for almost twice compared to a subsequent indoor lesson.

*We wanted to see if we could put the nature effect to work in a school setting. If you took a bunch of squirmy third-graders outdoors for lessons, would they show a benefit of having a lesson in nature, or would they just be bouncing off the walls afterward?" – Ming Kuo, lead study author*

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The study was conducted over a 10-week period in a Midwestern elementary school. Two third-grade classrooms participated. One of the classrooms had a teacher who was enthusiastic about the concept while the other teacher who was skeptical, thinking like many do that there would be too many distractions. Each teacher held one lesson a week outside before returning to their regular classroom setting.

*The outdoor classroom was a grassy spot just outside the school, within view of a wooded area. Following the outdoor lesson, class engagement was assessed in four ways: the teacher's perception of the students' level of engagements; the students' ratings of theirs and their classmates' engagement; the number of 'redirects' during the lesson, when teachers had to call the kids' attention back to the lesson; and independent photo ratings, where ratings of classroom engagement by an independent observer were based on photos of the observation period." – TreeHugger*

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What was the effect of lessons outside regarding classroom engagement? Does outdoor learning leave pupils too excited to focus? In this study, classroom engagement was improved after lessons in nature. The advantage of the time outside held true for “four of five measures of classroom engagement.”

*We found higher levels of classroom engagement after lessons in nature than after carefully matched classroom-based counterparts; these differences could not be explained by differences in teacher, instructional approach, class (students, classroom, and class size), time of year, or time of day, nor the order of the indoor and outdoor lessons on a given topic. It would seem that lessons in nature boost subsequent classroom engagement, and boost it a great deal; after a lesson in nature, teachers were able to teach for almost twice as long without having to interrupt instruction to redirect students' attention. This nature advantage persisted across 10 different weeks and lesson topics, and held not only for a teacher with positive expectations for nature-based lessons but also for a teacher who anticipated negative effects of such lessons. The findings here suggest that lessons in nature allow students to simultaneously learn classroom curriculum while rejuvenating their capacity for learning, or “refuel in flight.” Because providing children with more contact with nature in the course of the school day is likely to yield a whole host of additional dividends as well, including improved physical and mental health (see Chawla, 2015 for review), the findings here argue for including more lessons in nature in formal education.*

## **Recommended Reading:**

- *Five Things You Can Do to Help Your Child Manage ADHD Naturally*
- *ADHD, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, and Autism – What Do*

*They Have in Common?*

- *Shaken Baby Syndrome – Child Abuse or Vaccine Injury?*

This video takes things a step further, check it out!